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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this survey was to determine the effect of the Right to Read program on classroom practice during reading instruction and on elementary school teachers' expressed needs for graduate work in reading. A questionnaire was sent to teachers in the twenty-two Phase I Right to Read schools in Minnesota; it was also sent to teachers in Individually Guided Education (IGE) and traditionally organized schools that were matched for size and geographical region within the state. Results of the survey show that the Right to Read program does seem to be having an impact on certain classroom practices. Teachers in IGE and traditionally organized schools tended to answer many questionnaire items similarly. Most teachers, regardless of type of program, expressed the desire for graduate work in reading. (Author)

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A Survey of Reading Instruction: Right to Read, IGE, and Traditionally Organized Schools

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Minnesota's Right to Read program, Phase I beginning in 1972, has established reading as a top priority in the state education program. The effort is being evaluated by studying the impact on student achievement, attitudes of various school personnel, and accomplishment of the "State of Minnesota Criteria of Excellence in Reading Programing" (5).

Evaluation conducted by the Right to Read Office indicates that the Minnesota Right to Read program has been successful thus far in its impact on reading achievement (3) and attitudes (4). Some questions, however, have been raised about the lack of outside evaluation -" . . . an objective, non-biased type of report being designed to offset the testimonials and the band wagon techniques now being used in the news media. . ." (2). Questions have also been raised about the lack of involvement of colleges and universities in the Right to Read effort (2).

This study attempted to determine the impact of the Right to Read effort in one state, conducted by investigators who were not affiliated with the Right to Read Office. Since the Minnesota Right to Read plan has been adopted by other states, such as Pennsylvania, the effect of the Minnesota program on classroom practices seemed worthy of study. Also of interest was whether or not colleges and universities are perceived as being in a position to help in reading education.

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PROCEDURES

A twenty-three item questionnaire for elementary school teachers was designed to study classroom practices during reading instruction and the perceived need for continued teacher education. (The questionnaire is provided in the Appendix). The twenty-two Right to Read Phase I schools were matched in terms of size and geographical region within the state with Individually Guided Education (IGE) and traditionally organized schools, as closely as possible. Phase I schools were chosen because they had been in the Right to Read program the longest (since 1972). IGE, although not necessarily involving reading, does provide a school organization that is supposedly designed to meet individual needs in all subject areas. Traditionally organized schools were defined as those schools which were not officially designated Right to Read or IGE schools.

Questionnaires for the teachers were sent to the Right to Read directors or principals who were asked to give a questionnaire to each person who teaches reading in Grades 1-6. The questionnaires were to be sent anonymously and directly back to the investigators in stamped envelopes.

Chi-square tests were applied to all items in the questionnaire to determine if significant differences existed among the Right to Read, IGE, and traditionally organized schools.

RESULTS

Completed questionnaires were returned by 90 Right to Read teachers, 46 IGE teachers, and 44 teachers in traditionally organized schools. The percentage of returns is difficult to calculate since the exact number of teachers who teach reading is unknown. It is obvious, however, that twice as many

teachers in Right to Read schools as in IGE or traditionally organized schools responded.

The results are shown in the figures. Data from only those items where differences were expected or obtained are included.

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insert figures about here

DISCUSSION

In keeping with the official Right to Read emphasis in Minnesota, teachers in that program do seem to be using a single basal approach (see Figure 1). In fact, it appears that the single basal approach is the prevailing practice among all the teachers polled. Of the teachers who use the same materials with all children (which in most cases is a basal reader), most do have children in different places, particularly in the Right to Read schools (see Figure 2). Teachers in traditionally organized schools most often use different materials with various children which corresponds to less frequent use of a single basal approach. Right to Read teachers, however, tend to have more reading groups than teachers in IGE or traditionally organized schools (see Figure 3).

Not surprisingly, given the IGE emphasis on unit planning, instruction in IGE schools is more often a team effort than it is in the other schools (see Figure 4). IGE teachers also make greater use of paraprofessional help (see Figure 5).

Although Right to Read teachers are more likely than others to use instructional objectives for reading, a large percent (75%) of teachers in traditionally organized schools do also (see Figure 6). It is surprising,

however, that only 56 percent of all the teachers polled preassess for skills mastery before instruction (see Figure 7). Only 60 percent of the IGE teachers preassess although preassessment is an integral part of the IGE model (1). Almost all (91%) of the Right to Read teachers postassess for skill mastery after instruction, as do many teachers (75%) in traditionally organized schools (see Figure 8). However, one would expect that the practice of post-assessment would be higher among IGE teachers.

The second purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the perceptions of inservice teachers about the adequacy of their training and the need for continuing their education in reading through colleges or universities. Teachers in traditionally organized schools appear to be the least satisfied that they are using the best instructional approach for all children (see Figure 9). In spite of the organized effort in reading only 54% of the Right to Read teachers are satisfied that they are using the best instructional approach. Surprisingly, most teachers (70%) in all types of schools feel that they have changed their approach during the past five years, regardless of whether they were part of a special program such as Right to Read or IGE (see Figure 10). Most teachers (75%), regardless of school organization, also indicated that they would take graduate courses in reading if offered in their area (see Figure 11). Apparently, inservice education conducted by an agency other than the colleges and universities does not take care of all expressed needs for further education in reading.

IMPLICATIONS

It appears that the Right to Read program is having an effect on classroom practices. More groups are being formed even if only one set of instructional materials is being used. Postassessment for skill mastery seems to be

occurring, especially among the Right to Read schools.

Teachers in traditionally organized schools seem to be using a greater variety of materials, presumably to accommodate individual needs. They, however, express less satisfaction that their instructional approach is the best one. Do teachers who attempt to differentiate among students in instructional materials feel more frustration? Or does being affiliated with an organization, such as Right to Read or IGE, give one the feeling of doing a better job?

IGE teachers were predictably high on teaming and use of paraprofessionals. Otherwise, they tended to answer the questionnaire like teachers in traditionally organized schools. Particularly surprising was that they did not form more instructional groups than teachers in traditionally organized schools; they also did not use instructional objectives for reading more frequently, nor did they postassess for skill mastery after instruction more often. Perhaps the IGE effort has not been extended to reading in those schools polled.

Although data from questionnaires may be considered questionable since subjects may not answer truthfully, some insights may be gained by looking at a large number of responses. Since this questionnaire was anonymous, respondents had no reason to falsify answers, and it does provide some information that would otherwise be unobtainable. The picture gained from studying Minnesota schools, however, may or may not be typical of practices in reading nationally.

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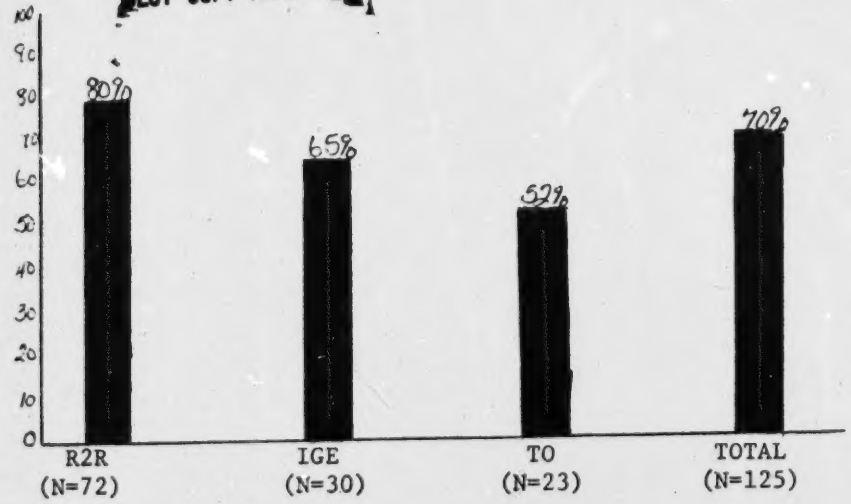

Figure 1. Use of a Single Basal Approach.
(χ^2 = 28.04, p < .006): Item 12

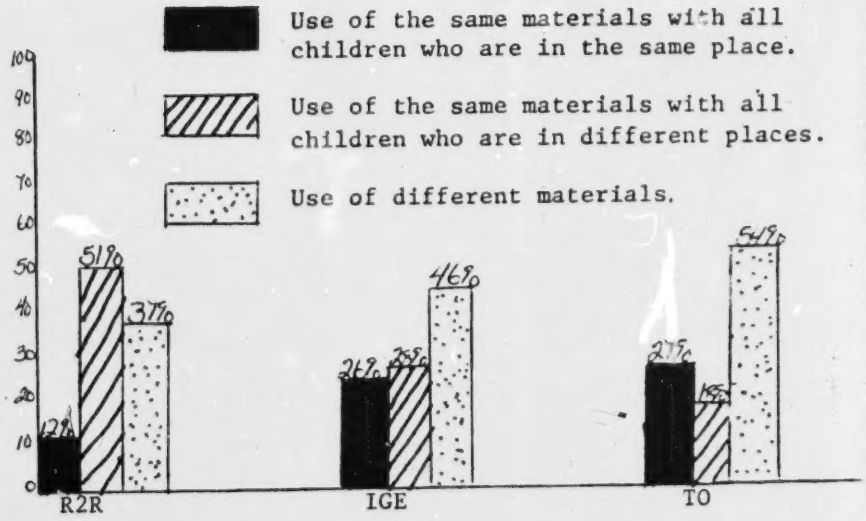

Figure 2. Differentiation of Instructional Materials
(χ^2 = 17.04, p < .002): Item 5

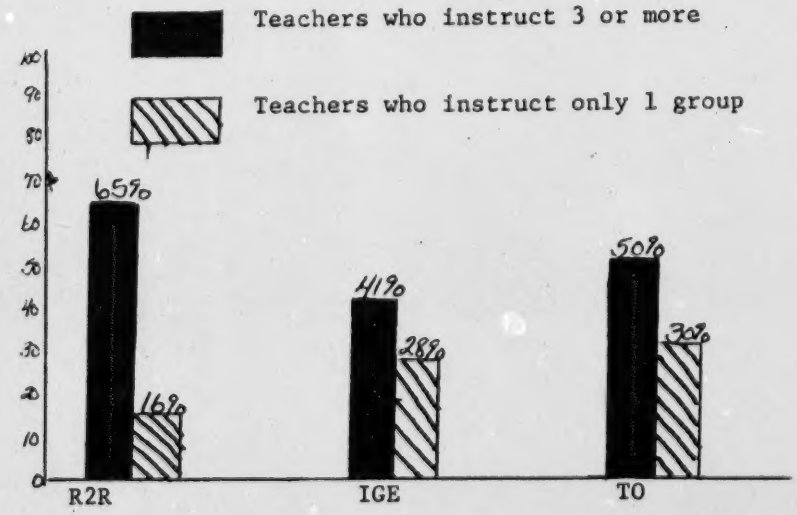

Figure 3. Number of Reading Groups Taught
(χ^2 = 27.39, p < .04): Item 4

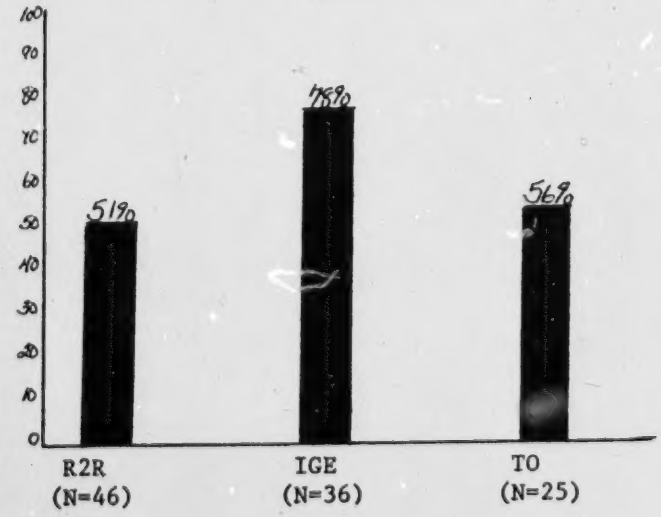

Figure 4. Team Teaching. (χ^2 = 9.47, p < .01): Item 8

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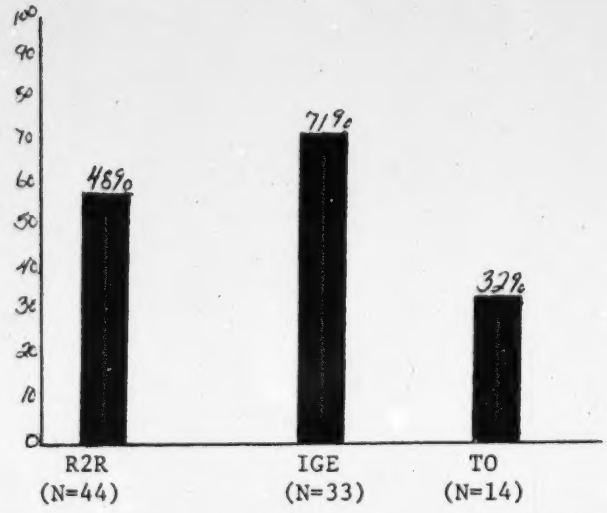

Figure 5. Use of Paraprofessional Help ($\chi^2 = 14.54$, $p < .001$): Item 9

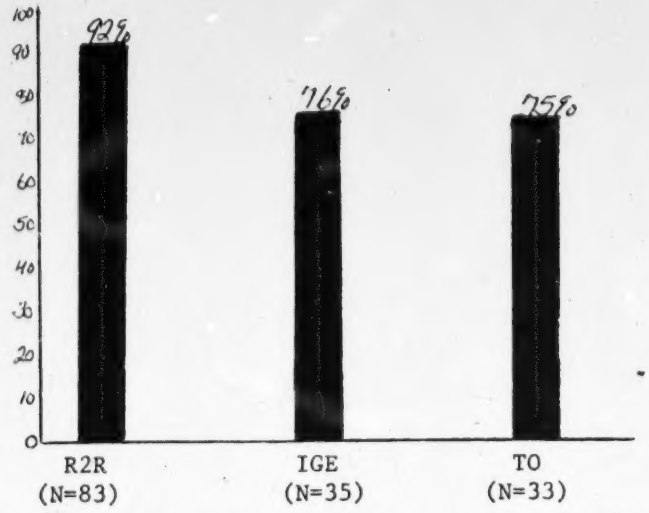

Figure 6. Use of a List of Instructional Objectives for Reading Skills. ($\chi^2 = 13.41$, $p < .04$): Item 16

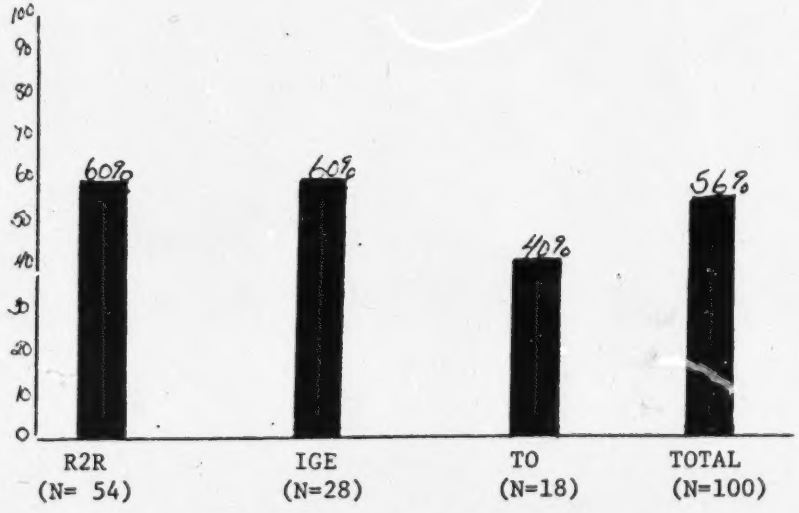

Figure 7. Use of Preassessment Skills Test ($\chi^2 = 15.98$, $p < .003$): Item 17

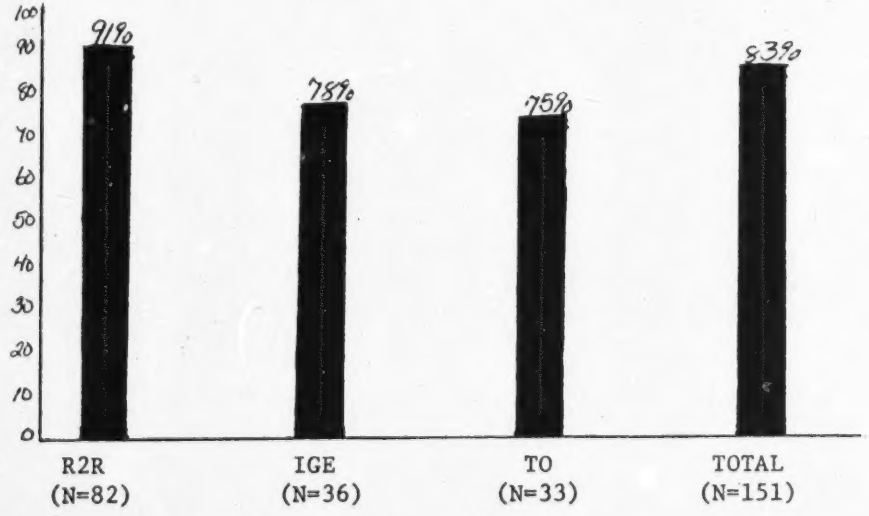

Figure 8. Use of Postassessment Skills Tests ($\chi^2 = 17.46$, $p < .02$): Item 18

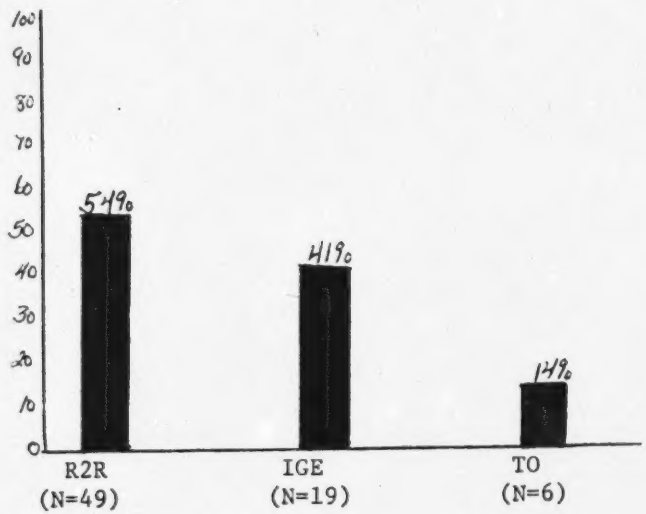

Figure 9. Satisfaction that Approach Used Most Often is Effective in Teaching All Children. (χ^2 = 20.43, p < .0004): Item 13

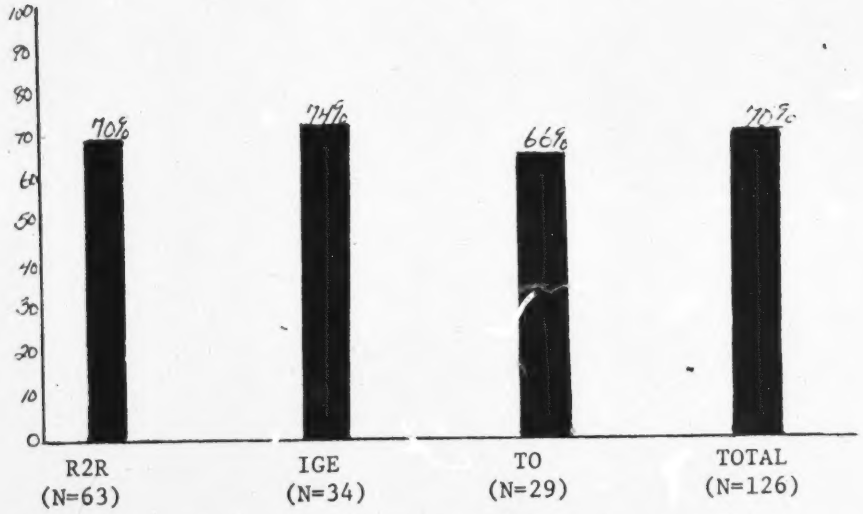

Figure 10. Teachers who Have Changed Their Approach (χ^2 = 1.49, p < .83): Item 10

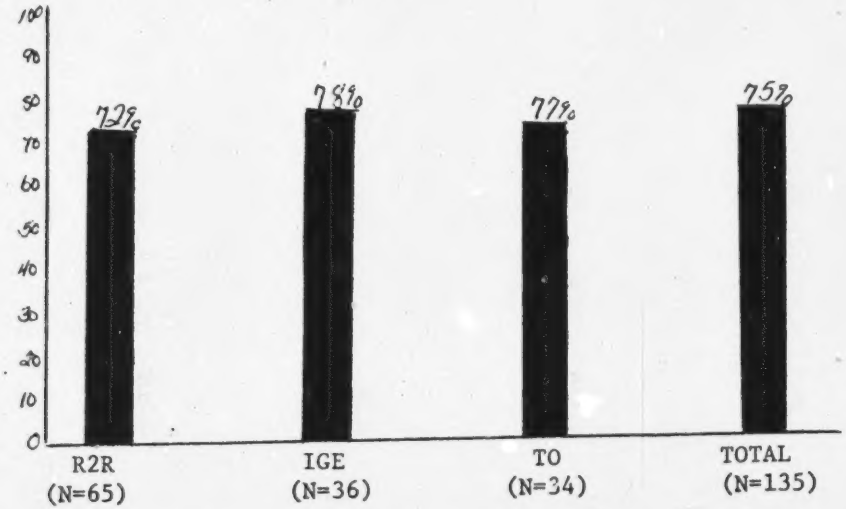

Figure 11. Willingness to Take Graduate Courses in Reading. (χ^2 = 6.52, p < .16): Item 22

APPENDIX

TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE ANSWER EVERY QUESTION. DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME.

1. Has your school been designated:

_____Right to Read
_____IGF
_____Other (please name_____)
_____None of the above

2. What grade level do you teach?

_____1 _____4
_____2 _____5
_____3 _____6

3. How many years have you taught?_____

4. How many reading groups do you teach?

_____0 _____5
_____1 _____6
_____2 _____7
_____3 _____8
_____4 _____9

5. Are these groups working

_____in the same place with the same materials?
_____in different places with the same materials?
_____in different materials?

6. Do you directly instruct each group every day?

_____yes
_____no

7. Do you form groups that meet for a short time for a special need?

_____yes
_____no

8. Do you "team" with other teachers for reading instruction (team teaching, exchanging pupils, etc)?

_____yes
_____no

9. Do you use paraprofessionals to help with reading instruction?

_____yes
_____no

10. Have you changed your approach to teaching reading -- not just instructional materials-- in the past five years?

_____yes
_____no

11. If yes, please describe this change._____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

12. What one approach to reading instruction do you use most often?

_____Single Basal
_____Multi-Basal
_____Language Experience
_____Individualized
_____Linguistic
_____Other (please name_____)

13. Are you satisfied that this one approach is effective in teaching all children in your classroom?

_____yes
_____no

14. Check any of the following approaches you use on a regular basis to supplement your reading instructional program?

_____Single Basal
_____Multi-Basal
_____Language Experience
_____Individualized
_____Linguistic
_____Other (please name_____)

15. If you use a basal approach, what set or sets of materials do you use most ofte

_____Ginn
_____Houghton Mifflin
_____Scott Foresman
_____SRA
_____Lippencott
_____Macmillan
_____Other (please name_____)

16. Do you have a list of instructional objectives for reading skills that you follow?

_____yes
_____no

17. If yes, do you use tests of specific skills to pre-assess whether children have mastered the skills before you teach them?

_____yes
_____no

18. If yes to item 16, do you use tests of specific skills to post-assess whether children have mastered the skills after you have taught them?

_____yes
_____no

19. If you do use tests of specific skills, are they

_____teacher made
_____part of the regular commercial instructional program
_____part of an additional skill development system

18. How are reading skills usually reinforced?

_____workbooks & worksheets
_____games
_____learning center activities
_____other (please name_____)

19. Do you think most children learn to read most effectively if they

_____first learn the letter sounds and then blend them together into words?
_____first learn sight words before learning letter sounds as used in words?
_____other (please describe_____)

20. What do you feel motivates the beginning reader more strongly?

_____his interest in the story.
_____his desire to master the processes or skills involved in reading.
_____other (please describe_____)

21. What do you feel should have been emphasized more in your preservice reading education?_____

_____

22. Would you strongly consider taking graduate courses in reading if they were offered in your area?

_____yes
_____no

23. If yes, what specific aspects of reading instruction would you like to see emphasized?

_____

_____

THANK YOU